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TO THE

Electors of the County of Glengarry.

GENTLEMEN—As I understand that considerable speculation and uncertainty exists throughout the County as to the position which I shall occupy at the coming General Election, now within measurable distance whether there be a further session of the existing Parliament or not, I deem it fair to the Electorate and just to myself definitely and immediately to state the position which I shall then assume.

It is within the knowledge of you all that there has recently arisen, owing to the decision of the Judicial Committee of Her Majesty's Privy Council in England, the highest Court in the British Empire, an important issue in Canadian affairs which calls for prompt action or declaration of policy, if not immediate solution.

I refer to the vexed question of the Separate Schools in the Province of Manitoba. Shortly the position is as follows:

Previous to the entry of what now constitutes that Province, which was then known as the Red River Settlement, ~~with~~ the Dominion of Canada in 1870, Separate Schools of both denominations, Catholic and Protestant, had for many years existed and were supported and controlled by those belonging to the respective denominations. It was then stipulated and expressly understood and agreed, as much in the interest of the Protestant portion of the community as of the French Canadian and Catholics—for it was then a matter of conjecture only whether that Province would in process of time have preponderating Protestant or Catholic population—that in the event of future settlement what it might the system of Separate Schools should continue to prevail, recognized by law and sanctioned and aided by Government under the new Constitution. It was on those terms only that Manitoba entered the Confederation.

The compact as to Separate Schools continued to be recognized and faithfully observed by the Government and Legislature of the Province until the year 1890, when the Legislature passed an Act abolishing the Separate Schools of the Catholics and declaring that in the future, a system of Common schools only should prevail, to which Catholics and Protestants must send their children, and to which both alike must contribute their School rates, with the result that not only were the Catholic Schools confiscated without compensation to those who erected them, but the Catholic people are now compelled to pay two sets of School rates—the one to satisfy the law and the other to satisfy their consciences and afford their children education.

To obtain redress from this intolerable injustice the Catholics promptly appealed to the Courts to have the Act annulled as being beyond the jurisdiction of the Legislature, relying upon the express terms of the Act of Union and the situation of affairs previous to the entry of Manitoba into the Confederation. After a number of decisions had been given in the Courts, some in favor of the contention of the Catholics and others adverse thereto (that of the Supreme Court of Canada being unanimous in their favor), it was ultimately decided by the Privy Council in England that the Act was within the competency of the Legislature to pass, and that it could not on that ground, whatever its demerits or flagrant injustice, be declared invalid.

Again did the Catholics of the Province, conscious of the inherent justice of their case and confident that in the end right must prevail, appeal to the Courts of Law, this time to settle the question as to whether it was not within the power of the Governor-General-in-Council to afford relief by remedial legislation or otherwise, with the result that the Privy Council of Great Britain eventually and very recently declared that the Governor-General-in-Council—meaning thereby the Government of Canada—had the power, if disposed, to apply the remedy.

Such, to-day, is the position of affairs, and the situation is one of extreme gravity.

It must be manfully met by those who are actuated by a sense of justice and possessed of the courage of their convictions. The question then is: shall there or shall there not be remedial legislation or other substantial relief such as will meet the exigency of the case and be satisfactory and just to the Manitoba minority?

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There is no room for doubt as to the facts and of the existence of the Catholic Schools under the sanction of such law as obtained in the Red River Settlement before 1870, although previous to that no Legislative sanction had taken place, solely for the good and all-sufficient reason that there existed no Legislature in the Settlement prior to its entry into Confederation when the Province was erected and a Legislature assigned to it. But the schools existed as a fact, and had existed from the very earliest settlement of the country, when it became the rendezvous of those hardy pioneers of civilization, the French Canadian *voyageurs* and *coureurs des bois*, the homes of their wives and children and the missions of their devoted clergy. Then and at a time far beyond the memory of living man were Catholic Schools established and those people continued in the uninterrupted enjoyment of them down to the period of the erection of the Province in 1870 and thenceforward to the year of 1890. It would be useless to deny it, for it is matter of authentic history and of common notoriety; it would be as futile to dispute the fact that seasons of the year prevailed in the Red River Settlement before it became the Province of Manitoba as elsewhere.

The Manitoba minority, therefore, are clearly within their rights in demanding justice and redress at the hands of the Government and Parliament of Canada. They are British subjects, and like all other subjects of Her Majesty, are entitled to those rights which to Britons belong. The Act which deprived them of their rights was one of legal spoliation which they cannot in reason be expected to endure while the Privy Council of England has declared that the authority of the Government and Parliament of Canada is supreme and can apply appropriate remedy.

If then, Electors of Glengarry, the Government of Canada deals with this matter as a Government question or goes to the Country with a declared policy of well-defined and satisfactory relief, I will be found standing where in the past I have ever stood, sinking all personal differences however great or grievous I have found them to be, and supporting with might and main the candidate of the Conservative party, be the nominee who he may or my personal relations with him what they may. The Electors of Glengarry are aware that never in the past have I allowed personal differences or grievance to stand in the way nor any ambition of mine to alter my course of unswerving loyalty to that great party led so often to victory by Sir John Macdonald, greater and most illustrious, as he was also most just of Canadian Statesmen, and to which, by birth, by tradition and conviction and the associations of a lifetime I belong, and for which in my four and forty years of life I have fought at least a hundred battles with loyalty and courage always and not infrequently with success, not for myself but for others.

But I claim at the hands of the leader of the party and his colleagues charged with the direction and control of affairs a declaration of their policy on the vexed and all-absorbing question now engaging the attention of the Canadian people and of such vast moment to our fellow-subjects who compose the minority in the Province of Manitoba. As a lifelong supporter of the Conservative cause (as, Electors of Glengarry, those of you longest resident of the County know my family ever to have been since the earliest times in the history of this Country, whether they sat in Parliament as representatives or as electors polled their votes) I have a right to require it, and you and the people of Canada have the right to be taken into their confidence. It must be definite and binding upon the Government and the Conservative party throughout the Dominion, and especially upon those who seek under its banner to be returned to the next Parliament; it must be in accordance with the traditions of the Conservative party, which, under the leadership of Sir John Macdonald, maintained power owing to the fact that it maintained the right; and it must therefore be one which will satisfy the reasonable claims and rights of the minority in Manitoba, despoiled of their rights and now claiming justice at the hands of a Government clothed with the power if it be possessed of the desire and determination of placing them in the position in which they stood previous to the passage of the unjust law which is the subject of their legitimate and well-founded complaint.

Upon that assurance being authoritatively given I shall not, as I have stated, be a candidate at the polls.

But if it be not given, I now publicly pledge myself, *coute qu'il coute*, and quite regardless as to how far my doing so may conflict with the selfish ambition of any individual however designing and aspiring, to ask the people of Glengarry, Protestant and Catholic, hitherto Conservative and erstwhile Reformer alike, to justify and endorse the principle upon which I shall appeal to them, namely: that no wrong capable of being redressed by the paramount authority of the Government and Parliament of the Dominion shall be perpetrated by its Legislature upon the minority in any Province of the Dominion, and be perpetuated and condoned under the fallacious plea of Provincial rights.

The existence of every wrong implies the right to remedy and redress; and in the case under consideration, should the Government upon whom the duty is primarily thrown evade the issue by appealing to the Country without action or a declared policy, no matter how excellent their intentions may be, they will then practically have abdicated their functions and have asked those in sympathy with the Manitoba minority to take a leap in the dark regardless of what lies before them or in what bog they may land and leave the people of Canada to decide the matter for themselves. It will then, I submit, behoove the electors of Glengarry to return to Parliament a man pledged to the principle I have endeavored to enunciate, and who will support it not only by his vote but by his voice, his energy, his time, influence and such ability, however humble it may be, with which his Creator has endowed him

I will ask the Electors of Glengarry to emphasize that principle so that it may be understood for all time so far as we are concerned, that our people are fair minded and just, that intolerance or oppression shall not be permitted in any portion of the Dominion, and that the minorities in the several Provinces will be protected in the enjoyment of their liberties and undoubted rights, whether they be Protestants in the Province of Quebec or Catholics elsewhere throughout the Dominion.

In conclusion, let me call your attention to these facts: That from Ottawa, the Capital of Canada, westward through the Provinces of Ontario and Manitoba, the North-West Territories and the Province of British Columbia to the Pacific coast, a section of Country containing a population of 892,519 people professing the Catholic religion, there is in the present Parliament but one solitary Catholic representative, Mr. Lariviere of Provencher, returned to champion the cause of the oppressed minority; while to show how fair-minded and just are the Catholics where they are in the majority, there are in the Province of Quebec, outside of Montreal, eleven Protestant gentlemen returned to a Protestant population of 148,273, to attend to the interests and just claims of their co-religionists and compatriots. In the Province of Ontario, with 858,300 of a Catholic population, but three gentlemen of that persuasion sit in Parliament (all of them from east of the Capital), viz.: Messrs Bergin of Cornwall, Proulx of Prescott and Robillard of Ottawa. In this very County of Glengarry, with a population of 9,983 Protestants and 12,464 Catholics, never once in the 28 years since Confederation has a Catholic been elected to the Provincial Legislature, and but two, Messrs. D. A. Macdonald and Purcell, to the Parliament of the Dominion, as against four, Messrs. McNabb, John McLennan, McMaster and R. R. McLennan, who are of another creed.

With some degree of reason and propriety, therefore, might a co-religionist of the oppressed Manitoba minority seek your suffrages at the coming election to a Parliament whose first and paramount duty will be to mete out to them that measure of justice denied to them by the majority in their own Province, and if necessary to enforce it by the strong arm of the law.

Pending action on the part of the Government I would suggest to the Electors to reserve judgment, making no promises, and until they hear what the candidates state openly upon the hustings. Private assurances in this case had better be entirely ignored as being worse than useless.

I am, Gentlemen, with great respect,

Your friend and faithful servant,

J. A. MACDONELL,

(Greenfield.)

February 13th, 1895.